

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
White River Field Office
73544 Hwy 64
Meeker, CO 81641

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-110-2006-007-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER COC69308

PROJECT NAME: 138 KV line to Exxon Mobil facility

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: 6th Principal Meridian
T.2S., R.97W.,
Sec. 28, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$,
Sec. 33, lots 3, 5, 6, NW $\frac{1}{4}$,
Sec. 34, S $\frac{1}{2}$ S $\frac{1}{2}$.
T.3S., R.96W.,
Sec. 6, lot 6.
T.3S., R.97W.,
Sec. 1, S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$,
Sec. 2, lots 1, 3, 4,
Sec. 3, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$.

APPLICANT: White River Electric Association (WREA)

ISSUES AND CONCERNS: This proposed powerline is in an area identified as a "D" polygon in the White River Fire Management Plan. White River Electric is aware of the Fire Plan designation, and their letter confirming this is attached as Exhibit C.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:

Proposed Action: The Power Line Plan of Development is attached as Exhibit B and is a part of this Proposed Action.

Summary: WREA proposes to construct an overhead 3-phase 138 KV power line to provide electric service to the proposed ExxonMobil Central Treating Facility. The power source will be the existing WREA Piceance sub-station located on public lands near the old Cb tract in Cottonwood Gulch. The line proceeds cross country to the northwest to the proposed Exxon CTF, which would be located in the Dry Gulch area. The line will be for year around use. WREA projects that additions could be used in the future for improving service and providing backup to

the Piceance/ Black Sulphur areas. WREA requests a 30 year term and would like to start construction June 1, 2006 or as soon as the ExxonMobil facility is approved. They plan on a schedule of 90 to 120 days, depending on weather, and a workforce of 6-8 employees using cranes and trucks. Flagging and siting of the structures has been completed. Cultural, Threatened and Endangered plant, and raptor surveys and reports have been submitted.

Access: WREA will gain access to each structure by using existing roads, 2-tracks and trails, and overland travel, as depicted in the attached map. They will utilize areas of previous disturbance associated with the Cb project, the PL Lane, and old chained areas; attempting not to disturb new trees. In the area from Hunter Creek to the end of the project, they would keep access within the right-of-way and use the sagebrush area. They will use off road type equipment. Access will not involve ground disturbance.

The route will be cleared around each pole in a 50-75 foot radius with a hydroax to provide a buffer for fire suppression and provide an area for framing the structures. The line will be built with wooden H-Frame structures (poles), averaging 60-65 foot tall, supporting aluminum hardware and wire, grounded, and built for raptor protection. Plans are for 31 structures at an average of 800 foot spans with the potential for spans of over 1200 feet. Angle corners require a 3-pole structure and guy wires and a cleared area of 100 foot radius.

The route will total 4.6 miles with 4.3 miles (24,288 feet) on federal lands. WREA requests a 100 foot width for a total potential disturbed area of approximately 55.76 acres on public land. However, the entire ROW will not be cleared and is requested only for safety and power line clearance regulations. Area to be cleared for each structure (pole assembly) will be up to a 75 foot radius (100 feet for angle structures) for a total maximum cleared area of approximately 13 acres for the structures.

Staging Areas: The construction work yard, storage, and primary staging area will be on private land. Secondary staging will be on or near the center line of the proposed ROW. Framing pads will be within 50 feet of the structures (poles).

Top soil will be removed and stored as needed. No Storm Water Management Plan is anticipated because of the minimal soil disturbance. If larger trees are required to be removed, they will be stored along the right-of-way and moved to an area for wildlife values. No fertilizer use is anticipated. Access will be limited to construction and future maintenance. Disturbed areas and roads not necessary for maintenance will be immediately reclaimed as required. Fire control will be as directed by the BLM. Rio Blanco County will review the project under their land use regulations.

No Action Alternative: The proposed action would not be authorized and the power line would not be built. An alternative power source for the proposed Exxon plant would be sought.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: None

NEED FOR THE ACTION: The purpose of the action is to construct a power line to connect existing lines to the proposed Exxon Mobil facility. Exxon Mobil needs electrical service to

proceed with its project. The line could also be a part of filling future needs for electrical service to the Piceance and Black Sulphur areas.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

Date Approved: July 1, 1997

Decision Number/Page: Pages 2-49 thru 2-52

Decision Language: “To make public lands available for the siting of public and private facilities through the issuance of applicable land use authorizations, in a manner that provides for reasonable protection of other resource values.”

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: The entire White River Resource area has been classified as either attainment or unclassified for all pollutants, and most of the area has been designated prevention of significant deterioration (PSD) class II. The proposed action is not located within a ten mile radius of any special designation air sheds or non-attainment areas. The air quality criteria pollutant likely to be most affected by the proposed actions is the level of inhalable particulate matter, specifically particles ten microns or less in diameter (PM₁₀) associated with fugitive dust. In addition, slight increases in the following criteria pollutants: carbon monoxide, ozone (secondary pollutant), nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide may also occur during construction due to the combustion of fossil fuels. Also, non-criteria pollutants such as visibility, nitric oxide, air toxics (e.g. benzene) and total suspended particulates (TSP) may also experience slight short term increases as a result of the proposed actions (no national ambient air quality standards have

been set for non-criteria pollutants). Unfortunately, no monitoring data is available for the survey area. However, it is apparent that current air quality near the proposed location is good because only one location on the western slope (Grand Junction, CO) is monitoring for criteria pollutants other than PM₁₀. Furthermore, the Colorado Air Pollution Control Division (APCD) estimates the maximum PM₁₀ levels (24-hour average) in rural portions of western Colorado like the Piceance Basin to be near 50 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³). This estimate is well below the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for PM₁₀ (24-hour average) of 150 µg/m³ (APCD, 2005).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Cumulative impacts detrimental to air quality in the Piceance Creek Basin can be expected as carbon monoxide, ozone (secondary pollutant), nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, and sulfur dioxide levels are elevated due to increased oil and gas associated development. Construction equipment producing elemental and organic carbon via fuel combustion combined with surface disturbing activities that leave soils exposed to eolian processes will both increase production of particulate matter (PM₁₀) during construction. Elemental and organic carbon existing in the air as PM₁₀ can reduce visibility and increase the potential of respiratory health problems to exposed parties. However, following initial construction, suggested mitigation, and successful reclamation criteria pollutant levels should return to near pre-construction levels.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: To minimize production of fugitive particulate matter (fugitive dust) from access routes, vehicle speeds must not exceed 15 mph *or* dust plume must not be visible at appropriate designated speeds for road design. In addition, re-vegetation efforts of all disturbed surfaces will promptly follow completion of the proposed actions. A BLM approved seed mixture will be utilized as outlined in the vegetation section of this document.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: a proposed route has been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level to an overall width of 200 feet (Conner 2005, Compliance Dated 9/23/2005) with no new cultural resources identified in the inventoried route.

However, as of 10/27/2005 all access routes, staging areas and work areas for the powerline have not been identified and inventoried for cultural resources.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: If the route inventoried for the power line is used there will be no new impacts to cultural resources. However, further inventory will be required to ensure that access routes, staging areas and work areas do not impact cultural resources.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: 1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated

with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

3. Four hundred feet of proposed access road between stations 104+85 and 110+95 has not been adequately inventoried. This is identified as an existing road. However, any vegetation manipulations or deviations from the actual existing disturbance must be inventoried by an approved archaeologist prior to proceeding with the disturbance. NOTE: the proposed action does not include this segment, but it was included in error on a draft map. This item will not be carried forward as a mitigation measure.

4. No upgrading or brush removal outside of existing access road disturbance is permitted without prior cultural resources inventory.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: Noxious weeds known to occur in the general area of the project include houndstongue, black henbane, bull thistle, spotted knapweed and diffuse knapweed. The invasive annual cheatgrass also occurs in the area, primarily in association with areas of unvegetated soil disturbance adjacent to roads.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will create about 13 acres of new earthen disturbance, which if it is not revegetated with desirable species and /or treated with herbicides to eradicate noxious weeds/ cheatgrass, will be invaded and dominated by noxious weeds/cheatgrass, increasing the potential for fire and the consequent further proliferation of cheatgrass. Noxious weeds could also spread from the project site to surrounding native rangelands resulting in a long term negative impact. The resulting proliferation of noxious weeds/cheatgrass will perpetuate a downward cycle of environmental degradation that will be largely irreversible. There will be a low likelihood of long term negative impact if the proposed mitigation is properly implemented.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: The operator will be required to monitor the project area for a minimum of three years post disturbance and eradicate all noxious and invasive species which occur on site using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The project corridor intersects approximately 1.8 miles of pinyon-juniper woodlands, 1 mile of Wyoming big sagebrush basins and toeslopes, .2 miles of basin big sagebrush valleys, 1.13 miles of previously chained areas and .5 miles of sagebrush that is encroached by young pinyon and juniper trees. These habitats are occupied by an array of breeding migratory birds from mid-May through mid-July. Several of these species have been identified as having higher conservation interest, including: black-throated gray warbler, gray flycatcher, and pinyon jay in the woodlands; Brewer's sparrow and green-tailed towhee in the shrubland types. It is likely that the shrubland types traversed by the proposed ROW generally support full complements of avian communities associated with the various forms of sagebrush. However, as sagebrush becomes increasingly encroached by pinyon and juniper regeneration, these species tend to decline in favor of more generalized species, such as chipping sparrow and blue-gray gnatcatcher. The involved woodland bird communities are likely inhabited by a relatively poor assemblage of pinyon-juniper obligates, due to the young and open canopies.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action is expected to be constructed no earlier than August 2006 and would, therefore, have little influence on the reproductive activities of migratory birds. In the unlikely event construction is delayed significantly and occurred synchronous with the breeding season, this linear project would disturb relatively few nest attempts. Approximately 6-12 acres of predominately sagebrush habitat would be subject to disturbance. This level of impairment is discountable on a landscape scale as those species associated with these shrubland habitats (Brewer's sparrow and green-tailed towhee) are consistently two of the most abundant and widely distributed species in this area's shrubland habitats.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no action authorized that would adversely influence migratory bird reproductive activities.

Mitigation: None

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: There are no threatened, endangered or sensitive animal species that are known to inhabit or derive important use from the project area.

Historically, sage-grouse were observed in the extensive sage park located due east of Dry Gulch. Although there have been no confirmed recent observations of sage-grouse, potential does exist for future occupation.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Installation of the powerline would have no conceivable influence on animals listed under the Endangered Species Act.

The powerline, as proposed will have no conceivable impacts on sage-grouse should reoccupation of the sage park occur. More than ½ mile separates the powerline from the sage park, effectively eliminating potential perching opportunities for raptors.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: The no-action alternative would have no conceivable influence on animals listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: The proposed and no-action alternatives would have no influence on populations or habitats of animals associated with the Endangered Species Act or BLM sensitive species and, as such, would have no influence on the status of applicable land health standards.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: Field work was conducted on August 4 and August 11, 2005, to document the presence and/or absence of any special status plants and/or their suitable habitats. The Special Status plants known to occur in the Piceance Basin primarily depend on relatively barren shale habitats of the Green River Formation. Within the project area, the Green River Shale formation is sandwiched between several units of the Uintah formation. The Green River is easily distinguished from the Uintah by its' light gray (almost white) color, finer texture shale fragments and finer textured soil particles. The two most likely SSS plants to be encountered at the elevations of the project area are *Lesquerella congesta* (Dudley Bluffs bladderpod) and *Physaria obcordata* (Piceance twinpod), both listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. In this area, both species are restricted to relatively barren outcrops of the Thirteen Mile Creek Tongue of the Green River formation.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No Special Status species of plants were encountered within the areas surveyed and no suitable habitats were encountered. The power line route occurs entirely on soils derived from the Uintah Formation which is not suitable habitat for Special Status species.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: There is no reasonable likelihood that the proposed action or no action alternative would have an influence on the condition or function of Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive plant species. Thus there would be no effect on achieving the land health standard.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: No listed or extremely hazardous materials in excess of threshold quantities are proposed for use in this project. While commercial preparations of fuels and lubricants proposed for use may contain some hazardous constituents, they would be stored, used and transported in a manner consistent with applicable laws, and the generation of hazardous wastes would not be anticipated. Solid wastes would be properly disposed of.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No hazardous or other solid wastes would be generated under the no-action alternative.

Mitigation: The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid waste generated by the proposed actions.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: The proposed power line route is situated in the Middle Piceance Creek Watershed (5th level watershed). More specifically, the affected catchment areas are as follows: Piceance Creek, Hunter Creek, Willow Creek, and Cottonwood Gulch. The affected portion of Piceance Creek is situated in stream segment 15 of the White River Basin. Piceance Creek is a perennial tributary to the White River which is a tributary to the Green River (tributary to the Colorado River). Willow Creek (perennial) and Cottonwood Gulch are both tributaries to Piceance Creek and can be found in stream segment 16 of the White River Basin.

Hunter Creek (also a tributary to Piceance) is positioned in stream segment 20 of the White River Basin.

A review of the “Status of Water Quality in Colorado – 2004” (CDPHE, 2004b), Regulation No. 37 Classifications and Numeric Standards for Lower Colorado River Basin (CDPHE, 2004a), Regulation No. 93, 2004 Section 303(d) List Water-Quality-Limited Segments Requiring Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) (CDPHE, 2004c), Regulation No. 94, Colorado’s Monitoring and Evaluation List (CDPHE, 2004d), and the White River ROD/RMP was done to see if any water quality concerns have been identified. It should be noted that the White River from Piceance Creek to Douglas Creek has been listed on the states monitoring and evaluation list (M&E list) for sediment impairments. All surface disturbing activities associated with the proposed actions will directly influence sedimentation rates to Piceance Creek, the White River, and eventually the Colorado River.

Stream segment 15 of the White River Basin is defined as the mainstem of Piceance Creek from the Emily Oldland diversion dam to the confluence with the White River. Segment 15 has not been designated use-protected. An intermediate level of water quality protection applies to waters that have not been designated outstanding waters or use-protected waters. For these waters, no degradation is allowed unless deemed appropriate following an antidegradation review. The state has classified segment 15 as being beneficial for the following uses: Warm aquatic life 2, Recreation 1b, and Agriculture (CDPHE, 2004a).

Stream segment 16 of the White River Basin has been designated “Use Protected”. The antidegradation review requirements in the Antidegradation Rule are not applicable to waters designated use-protected. For those waters, only the protection specified in each reach will apply. The state has classified segment 16 as being beneficial for the following uses: Warm aquatic life 2, Recreation 2, and Agriculture. For stream segment 16 minimum standards for four parameters are listed as follows: dissolved oxygen = 5.0 mg/l, pH = 6.5 - 9.0, Fecal Coliform = 2000/100 ml, and 630/100 ml E. coli (CDPHE, 2004a).

Stream segment 20 of the White River Basin is defined as the mainstems of Black Sulphur and Hunter Creeks from their sources to their confluences with Piceance Creek. Segment 20 has not been designated use-protected. An intermediate level of water quality protection applies to waters that have not been designated outstanding waters or use-protected waters. For these waters, no degradation is allowed unless deemed appropriate following an antidegradation review. The state has classified segment 20 as being beneficial for the following uses: Cold aquatic life 1, Recreation 2, and Agriculture (CDPHE, 2004a).

Ground Water: Surface geologic formation at the proposed location is Tertiary in age (Uinta Formation) and consists primarily of sandstone and siltstone. No springs or water wells have been identified within 1 mile of the proposed action. The most likely source of ground water to be affected by the proposed actions is that of the localized alluvial/colluvial aquifers found in drainage bottoms.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Surface Water: Soil compaction and vegetation loss may occur in response to equipment operations associated with power-line

construction. Increased soil compaction and reductions in vegetative cover will further decrease soil permeability and infiltration rates elevating potential for erosive overland flows which may elevate sediment/salt loads to stream channels.

Ground Water: No impacts to ground water resources are anticipated. However, potential dose exist for contaminants resulting from leaks or spills (e.g. diesel fuels) to infiltrate soils and contact shallow ground water in alluvial/colluvial material.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: Mitigate potential impacts to surface water by restricting non emergency maintenance activities on power lines when soils become saturated to a depth of three inches or more. Disturbed surfaces must be revegetated with a BLM approved seed mixture as outlined in the vegetation section of this document. To prevent channelization and interference with surface water movement, adequate steps must be taken to inhibit OHV use on the approved ROW (e.g. signage, barriers).

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: All of the affected stream segments are currently listed as meeting state water quality standards. By adhering to suggested mitigation, water quality in the affected stream segments will remain unchanged.

WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: There are no wetlands or riparian communities potentially influenced by the proposed action. The nearest perennial water source is Piceance Creek which is located approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the proposed powerline.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Riparian and wetland communities would not be directly or indirectly affected by installation of the powerline.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate action authorized that would have potential to affect wetland or riparian communities.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: Because there are no riparian or wetland resources potentially influenced by the proposed or the no-action alternative, a land health standard finding is not relevant. As such, there would be no change in the land health status of downstream riparian and wetland communities.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:

No ACECs, flood plains, prime and unique farmlands, Wilderness, or Wild and Scenic Rivers exist within the area affected by the proposed action. There are also no Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The following data is a product of an order III soil survey conducted by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Rio Blanco County, CO. The following table (Table 1) highlights important soil characteristics. A complete summary of this information can be found at the White River Field Office.

Table 1

Soil Number	Soil Name	Slope	Affected Acres w/in 15 m radius	Ecological site	Salinity	Run Off	Erosion Potential	Bedrock
36	Glendive fine sandy loam		4.42	Foothills Swale	2-4	Slow	Slight	>60
64	Piceance fine sandy loam	5-15%	4.85	Rolling Loam	<2	Medium	Moderate to high	20-40
66	Potts-Begay fine sandy loams	2-7%	16.6	Loamy Salt desert/Sandy Salt desert	<2	Medium	Moderate	>60
70	Redcreek-Rentsac complex	5-30%	16.68	PJ woodlands/PJ woodlands	<2	Very high	Moderate to high	10-20
73	Rentsac channery loam	5-50%	12.92	Pinyon-Juniper woodlands	<2	Rapid	Moderate to very high	10-20

Within a the designated 100 foot wide ROW 5.76 acres of control surface use (CSU-1) “fragile soils” have been mapped. However, after observation of a topographic map, it was concluded that no surface disturbing activities will occur on slopes greater than 35 %. Thus, controlled surface use stipulations will not apply.

36-Glendive fine sandy loam (2 to 4 percent slopes) was formed in alluvium and is a deep, well drained soil located along alluvial valley floors. Elevation is 5,800 to 7,200 feet. The average annual precipitation is 14 to 17 inches, the average annual air temperature is 42 to 45 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 80 to 105 days.

Typically, the surface layer is pale brown fine sandy loam 6 inches thick. The underlying material to a depth of 60 inches or more is very pale brown, stratified fine sandy loam that has thin lenses of loamy fine sand to sandy clay loam. The soil is calcareous throughout.

Permeability of this Glendive soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is moderate.

Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow, and the hazard of water erosion is slight.

64-Piceance fine sandy loam (5 to 15 percent slopes) is a moderately deep, well drained soil found on uplands and broad ridgetops. It formed in eolian material and colluvium derived dominantly from sandstone. The native vegetation is mainly low shrubs, grasses, and a few pinyon trees. Elevation is 6,300 to 7,500 feet. The average annual precipitation is 15 to 18 inches, the average annual air temperature is 42 to 45 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 80 to 105 days. Typically, the surface layer is brown fine sandy loam 4 inches thick. The upper 5 inches of the subsoil is brown loam, and the lower 13 inches is light yellowish brown loam. The substratum is very pale brown channery loam 8 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 30 inches. Depth to sandstone ranges from 20 to 40 inches. Permeability of this Piceance soil is moderate. Available water capacity is moderately low. Effective rooting depth is 20 to 40 inches. Runoff is slow to medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high.

66-Potts-Begay fine sandy loam (2 to 7 percent slopes) is situated on fans and uplands. The native vegetation is mainly shrubs and grasses. Elevation is 5,400 to 6,000 feet. The average annual precipitation is 9 to 12 inches, the average annual air temperature is 47 to 49 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 105 to 130 days. This unit is 60 percent Potts fine sandy loam and 20 percent Begay fine sandy loam. The Potts soil is deep and well drained. It formed in eolian and alluvial material derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the surface layer is brown fine sandy loam 3 inches thick. The upper 11 inches of the subsoil is brown loam, and the lower 3 inches is light brown loam. The substratum to a depth of 60 inches or more is pink loam. Permeability of the Potts soil is moderate. Available water capacity is moderately high. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow to medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate.

The Begay soil is deep and well drained. It formed in eolian and alluvial material derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the upper part of the surface layer is light yellowish brown fine sandy loam about 3 inches thick. The lower part is light brown fine sandy loam about 6 inches thick. The subsoil is light brown fine sandy loam 9 inches thick. The upper 12 inches of the substratum is pink fine sandy loam, and the lower part to a depth of 60 inches or more is pink loamy fine sand. In some areas the surface layer is sandy loam or loam. Permeability of the Begay soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 60 inches or more. Runoff is slow, and the hazard of water erosion is slight. The hazard of soil blowing is moderate if the vegetation is removed.

70-Redcreek-Rentsac complex (5 to 30 percent slopes) is situated on mountainsides and ridges. The native vegetation is mainly pinyon and juniper trees with an understory of shrubs and grasses. Elevation is 6,000 to 7,400 feet. The average annual precipitation is 14 to 18 inches, the average annual air temperature is 42 to 45 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 85 to 105 days. This unit is 60 percent Redcreek sandy loam and 30 percent Rentsac channery loam. The Redcreek soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residual and eolian material derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the surface layer is brown sandy loam about 4 inches thick. The next layer is brown, calcareous sandy loam about 7 inches thick. The

underlying material is very pale brown, calcareous channery loam 5 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to hard sandstone or hard shale ranges from 10 to 20 inches. Permeability of the Redcreek soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high.

The Rentsac soil is shallow and well drained. It formed in residuum derived dominantly from sandstone. Typically, the upper part of the surface layer is grayish brown channery loam about 5 inches thick. The next layer is brown very channery loam about 4 inches thick. The underlying material is very pale brown extremely flaggy loam 7 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to hard sandstone or hard shale ranges from 10 to 20 inches. Permeability of the Rentsac soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is medium, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to high.

73-Rentsac channery loam (5 to 50 percent slopes) is a shallow, well drained soil found on ridges, foothills, and side slopes. It formed in residuum derived dominantly from calcareous sandstone. The native vegetation is mainly pinyon, juniper, brush, and grasses. Elevation is 6,000 to 7,600 feet. The average annual precipitation is 14 to 18 inches, the average annual air temperature is 42 to 45 degrees F, and the average frost-free period is 80 to 105 days. Typically, the surface layer is grayish brown channery loam about 5 inches thick. The next layer is very channery loam about 4 inches thick. The underlying material is extremely flaggy light loam 7 inches thick. Hard sandstone is at a depth of 16 inches. Depth to sandstone ranges from 10 to 20 inches. Permeability of this Rentsac soil is moderately rapid. Available water capacity is very low. Effective rooting depth is 10 to 20 inches. Runoff is rapid, and the hazard of water erosion is moderate to very high.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Ninety-two percent of the affected soils along the proposed power line route are listed as having moderate to very high erosive potential (Table 1). Improper drainage and soil stabilization techniques will increase potential for overland flows accelerating erosion rates leading to soil piping, head cutting and gully formation. Removal of limited ground cover will also expose soils to erosional processes. Traffic associated with construction and maintenance will increase soil compaction decreasing infiltration rates which in turn will also increase potential for erosive overland flows. Construction operations occurring during wet periods when soils are saturated may increase the degree of surface disturbance elevating the potential for hill slope soil erosion. Steep slopes near the Big Jimmy Gulch (~30% slope), and Hunter Creek (~29% slope) drainages will be the most significantly impacted.

Leaks or spills of environmentally unfriendly substances (e.g. diesel fuel) along the ROW may contaminate soils hindering revegetation efforts. Soils unable to support a healthy plant community will be less cohesive (due to lack of root structure) and more vulnerable to erosional processes. In addition, failure to promptly establish desirable vegetative cover over disturbed surfaces will increase the potential for weed infestation (e.g. cheat grass) along the ROW decreasing soil stability and elevating soil erosion potential.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: Utility truck traffic should be kept to a minimum to reduce the potential impacts of soil compaction. To further mitigate resource damage, timing of construction operations should be planned to avoid wet periods when soils are saturated (e.g. during spring thaw, after late summer monsoons). Spacing of power poles should be designed to avoid surface disturbance in steep areas (e.g. near Big Jimmy Gulch, and Hunter Creek). In addition, all disturbed surfaces shall be promptly revegetated with a BLM approved seed mixture as outlined in the vegetation portion of this document.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: Currently soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates representative of soil type, landform, climate, and geologic processes. The proposed actions will cause decreases in both infiltration and permeability rates due to soil compaction and loss of vegetal cover. However, with proper mitigation soils health standards will continue to be met.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The proposed action traverses pinyon-juniper woodland, chained pinyon-juniper woodland (circa 1965), early seral pinyon-juniper woodlands interspersed with Wyoming big sagebrush parks and several drainages dominated by basin big sagebrush. Many of the Wyoming big sagebrush parks are in the midst of a phase 1 invasion process by juniper.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The proposed action will create about (13) thirteen acres of new earthen disturbance. The principal impact to vegetation will be partial or complete removal of vegetation along the right of way, and the earthen disturbance associated with it. Brush beating/hydroaxe treatment for the structures and along the right of way will provide sufficient disturbance to allow for establishment of cheatgrass and therefore, *result in an increase in the potential for fire under the powerline.* In terms of plant community composition, structure and function, the principal negative impact over the long term would occur if cheatgrass or noxious weeds are allowed to establish and proliferate on the disturbed areas resulting from powerline construction and the associated brush beating/hydroaxe treatment. Construction of the powerline through what is now a D polygon will effectively preclude the use of fire as a natural revegetation agent over both the short and long term, negatively impacting plant community composition, structure and productivity.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation

Mitigation: To mitigate the loss of productivity that will result in the affected plant communities that will result from fire suppression to protect the proposed powerline, the proponent will be required to treat/revegetate 50 acres a year offsite for the next 5 years, for a total of 250 treatment acres. (As per WO IM 2005-069; offsite mitigation must be on a voluntary basis and cannot be carried forward as a stipulation; therefore this mitigation will not be carried forward.)

All disturbed areas on the entire right of way should be promptly reseeded with Native seed mix #3 to preempt cheatgrass dominance. Drill seeding is the preferred method of seeding. If seed is broadcast, double the seeding rate and provide for seed coverage by harrowing or dragging after seed application. Table rates are PLS pounds per acre.

Native Seed mix #3		
Western wheatgrass (Rosanna)	2	Gravelly 10"-14", Pinyon/Juniper Woodland, Stony Foothills, 147 (Mountain Mahogany)
Bluebunch wheatgrass (Whitmar)	2	
Thickspike wheatgrass (Critana)	1	
Indian ricegrass (Rimrock)	2	
Fourwing saltbush (Wytana)	1	
Utah sweetvetch	1	

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Upland plant communities in the project area currently meet the Standard and are expected to meet the Standard following project implementation if the stated mitigation measures are adhered to.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: There are no aquatic communities potentially influenced by the proposed action. Piceance Creek, the nearest perennial water source, is located approximately 1.5 miles northeast of the project area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Aquatic communities would not be directly or indirectly affected by installation of the powerline.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate action authorized that would have potential to affect aquatic communities.

Mitigation: None

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Because there are no aquatic habitats or animals potentially influenced by the proposed or no-action alternatives, a land health standard finding is not applicable. The proposed and no action alternatives would have no measurable influence on aquatic habitats associated with downstream systems.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Approximately 26 acres of the proposed corridor is classified by the Colorado Division of Wildlife as critical habitat for deer as severe winter range. These late winter and early spring ranges support 90% of the Piceance herd under the most severe winter conditions. The remaining area is categorized as general winter range for deer and elk and is generally used by big game from September through May. Road density-related impacts to big

game (i.e., elevated energy demands, habitat disuse) received prominent address in the White River RMP. Analysis of the issue resulted in the development of a land use decision which established effective road density objectives of 1.5 miles per square mile on big game critical habitats.

Raptor surveys were conducted on October 14 and 17, 2005 within ½ mile of the proposed route. Eight nests (4 probable accipiter, 3 kestrel, 1 unknown cavity nester) were located within the stands of mature pinyon-juniper woodlands. Four nests (1 probable golden eagle and 3 probable red-tailed hawk) were located on cliffs or rock outcrops. Seven of these nests (2 red-tailed, 3 kestrel and 2 accipiter) appeared to be active in 2005.

Small mammal populations are poorly documented, however, the species that are likely to occur in this area display broad ecological tolerance and are widely distributed throughout the Rocky Mountain regions. No narrowly distributed or highly specialized species or subspecific populations are known to inhabit this area.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The portion of the powerline east of Willow Creek is privately accessed, thereby precluding public vehicle use along the powerline corridor. It is unlikely subsequent vehicle use will occur on the portion of the ROW west of Hunter Creek. This area is slated for extensive future development which will likely deter the public from off-road vehicle travel. With the exception of the portion along Big Jimmy Ridge, the remainder of the proposed route involves short, isolated segments where overland travel would be necessary for powerline installation. These fragmented sections are unlikely to draw subsequent off-road vehicle use.

It is unlikely that the proposed action would have any negative impacts on breeding raptors. Construction of the power line is not scheduled to take place until mid-late August, well after most young have fledged and left the area. Construction of the project involves little if any disturbance to pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate action authorized that would have potential to affect terrestrial wildlife or habitats.

Mitigation: To prevent possible disturbance to the five nests found during the survey (2 probable red-tailed and 3 probable accipiter nests) that are in close proximity to the proposed power line, no construction activity shall take place prior to August 15, 2006. It is recommended that removal or damage to nest trees be avoided.

In the event that construction should be delayed until spring 2007, the area must be resurveyed prior to initiation of construction.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): The general project area currently meets the Public Land Health Standards for terrestrial wildlife. Installation of the powerline, as mitigated, would not compromise continued meeting of the standard.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access and Transportation			X
Cadastral Survey	X		
Fire Management			X
Forest Management		X	
Geology and Minerals		X	
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement		X	
Noise		X	
Paleontology			X
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations			X
Recreation			X
Socio-Economics		X	
Visual Resources			X
Wild Horses	X		

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

Affected Environment: The proposed powerline traverses approximately 4.6 miles where motorized travel is limited to existing routes. BLM roads 1010 (Big Jimmy Cutoff), 1011, 1009 and 1009A and several existing unnumbered two-tracks are crossed by the right-of-way.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Recreational motorized travel will likely traverse all right-of-way that is accessible potentially leading to the right-of-way becoming an unintentional travel route. The likelihood increases further if entire right-of-way is brush beat.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None.

Mitigation: None.

FIRE MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The proposed action falls within the D5 Cathedral Bluffs/Roan Plateau fire management polygon. This polygon is an area where fire is desired and there are few to no constraints to its use. The fuels which the powerline traverse include Wyoming sagebrush, reclaimed grassland, basin big sagebrush and pinion-juniper. The sagebrush fuel type ranges from 3-6 tons per acre, the grasslands < 1 ton/acre, the basin sagebrush ranges between 5

and 14 tons/acre, and the pinion juniper type ranges from 10-35 tons/acre. The proposed line goes through approximately 2850 meters of pinion juniper. The pinion-juniper fuel type presents the most difficulty to control in the event of a wildfire or a wildland fire use scenario due to the heavy fuel loading and terrain that the PJ fuel type occurs on along the route of the proposed right-of-way.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The placement of the right-of-way has the line running perpendicular to the predominant winds which during fire season (May 1- Sept 30) are almost continuously out of the south or southwest. The only time this would not be expected would be during the passage of cold fronts. Naturally occurring fires at the southern end of the Piceance Basin tend to run the ridge tops which are aligned in a south or southwest direction parallel to the predominant winds. The placement of the line in this manner will minimize the potential for wildland fire use for approximately one mile above the line due to the potential for slope alignment and predominant winds to push fire to the line very quickly without adequate time to get mitigation measures in place. This will change the fire management for this portion of the D5 polygon, removing 8000+ acres from fire use, since there will no longer be the opportunity for unconstrained use of naturally occurring fire to achieve resource and fire management objectives.

Structure #11 is planned to be placed at the top of a chimney and on the edge of a dense PJ stand with an average fuel loading of 30 tons/acre. Should fire occur at the bottom of Willow Creek, structure 11 will be at risk of loss or damage.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: None

Mitigation: Mitigation efforts to provide defensible space for the powerline structure is built into the proposed action. For structure #11, moving the structure 50m to the north into a southern exposure PJ woodland where fuel loading is approximately 5 tons/acre would expose the structure to less risk, or moving the structure 140m to the east, just off of the existing well pad would remove the risk of fire damage related to the dense PJ chimney and keep the line within the proposed r-o-w.

For all tree trimming operations where chainsaws will be used to remove trees that are too close to the sagging lines, or to allow access along the ROW, all produced slash must be lopped and scattered to a depth of no more than 12 inches, well away from center line of the ROW and all stumps must be cut flush with the ground.

PALEONTOLOGY

Affected Environment: The proposed power line is located in the Piceance Basin which is generally mapped as the Uinta Formation (Tweto 1979). In the Piceance Basin the Uinta Formation is classified as a Condition I formation which means it is known to produce scientifically important fossil resources.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Any excavations to construct tower locations, work areas, access routes for tower locations, or storage areas that extend into the underlying rock formations have the potential to adversely impact scientifically important fossils. Excavations for the tower footers also have the potential to adversely impact fossil resources but, if the tower footers are excavated by auger it is extremely difficult to identify excavate resources and evaluate impacts.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no new impacts under the No Action Alternative.

Mitigation: 1. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing paleontological sites, or for collecting fossils. If fossil materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear to be of noteworthy scientific interest
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not feasible)

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

2. If it should become necessary to excavate into the underlying rock formation to prepare a tower location, construct an access road into any tower location or construct a storage or staging area during then a paleontological monitor shall be present prior to the initiation of such construction.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT

Affected Environment: The proposed action occurs in the spring fall use area on two fenced units of the Piceance Mountain allotment (06023). Grazing use on these two units is permitted as follows:

Allotment		Permit #	Number of Livestock	Kind	Period of Use	Percent Public Land	Authorized Use (AUM)
06023	Piceance Mountain MTW	051407	400	C	05/01-05/15	49	97
	Piceance Mountain - Ira Johnson	051408	1026	C	05/15-11/15	61	3807

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: Powerline construction operations could temporarily disrupt livestock use in the affected area if conducted from May 1 –June 1 or 10/01-11/15. With applied mitigation there will be no long term negative impact.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There will be no change from the present situation.

Mitigation: All construction operations will be conducted such that integrity of allotment boundary and pasture fences will be maintained at all times. Any damage to range improvements as a result of powerline construction will be repaired to BLM specifications.

REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

Affected Environment: The purpose of the power line is to provide service to the proposed Exxon Mobil Central Treatment Facility, which is currently being analyzed under CO-110-05-219-EA. The route crosses approximately 4.3 miles of public lands. Part of the route falls within privately held lands. The source of the power line (Cb Substation) and terminus (Exxon CTF) are located on public lands and lie outside any designated utility corridors.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: The power line route will require a right-of-way authorization, which will be issued as COC69306. The authorization for the Exxon Mobil CTF has not been issued.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: If the power line is not authorized, there would be no additional impact.

Mitigation: 1. Construction shall not begin until the Exxon Mobil CTF is authorized, at which time a Notice to Proceed will be issued to White River Electric.

2. White River Electric should obtain appropriate permissions from the private land owners. Colorado One Call procedure should be initiated before earth moving activities and construction must not interfere with existing linear rights-of-way.

RECREATION

Affected Environment: The proposed action occurs within the White River Extensive Recreation Management Area (ERMA). BLM custodially manages the ERMA to provide for unstructured recreation activities such as hunting, dispersed camping, hiking, horseback riding, wildlife viewing and off-highway vehicle use.

Approximately 2 miles of the project area has been delineated a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM). SPM physical and social recreation setting is typically characterized by a natural appearing environment with few administrative controls, low interaction between users but evidence of other users may be present. SPM

recreation experience is characterized by a high probability of isolation from the sights and sounds of humans that offers an environment that offers challenge and risk.

Approximately 1.6 miles of the project area has been delineated a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Roaded Natural (RN). RN physical and social recreation setting may have modifications which range from being easily noticed to strongly dominant to observers within the area. However, from sensitive travel routes and use areas these alterations would remain unnoticed or visually subordinate. There is strong evidence of designed roads and/or highways. Structures are generally scattered, remaining visually subordinate or unnoticed to the sensitive travel route observer. Structures may include utility corridors, microwave installations and so on. Frequency of contact is moderate to high on roads and low to moderate on trails and away from roads. RN recreation experience is characterized by a moderate probability of isolation from the sights and sounds of humans that offers an environment that offers challenge and risk.

Approximately .6 miles of the project area has been delineated a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Rural (R). Rural physical and social recreation setting is culturally modified to the point that it is dominant to the sensitive travel route observer. This may include pastoral, agricultural, intensively managed wildland resource landscapes, or utility corridors. Pedestrian or other slow moving observers are constantly within view of culturally changed landscape. There is strong evidence of designed roads and/or highways. Structures are readily apparent and may range from scattered to small dominant clusters including utility corridors, farm buildings, microwave installations, and recreation sites. Frequency of contact is moderate to high at developed sites and on roads and trails; moderate away from developed sites. Rural recreation experience is characterized by a low probability of isolation from the sights and sounds of humans.

Approximately .2 miles of the project area has been delineated a Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class of Modified Urban (MU).

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: If action coincides with hunting seasons (September through November) it will most likely disrupt the experience sought by those recreationists. With the introduction of new powerlines and ancillary facilities, the sights and sounds associated with the human environment would result in a less naturally appearing environment.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: No loss of dispersed recreation potential and no impact to hunting recreationists.

Mitigation: None.

VISUAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The proposed action would be located in an area with a VRM III classification. The objective of this class is to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action: *Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed action would cross one area that would be visible to a casual observer traveling along Rio Blanco County Road 5, the most likely view point. The power line and 1-2 poles would be visible from this route. Because of the distance between the power poles and the presence of other power lines in the area, the proposed action would not dominate the view of the casual observer. The level of change to the characteristic landscape would be less than moderate, and the objectives of the VRM III classification would be retained.

Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative: There would be no impacts.

Mitigation: None

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: This project was initiated in response to the need for electrical service by current and pending oil and gas development in the mid-Piceance Basin, and remains consistent with the scope of impacts addressed in the White River ROD/RMP. The cumulative impacts of these activities are addressed in the White River ROD/RMP for each resource value that would be affected by the proposed action.

REFERENCES CITED:

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) Water Quality Control Commission (WQCC), 2004a. Regulation No. 37 Classifications and Numeric Standards for Lower Colorado River Basin. Adopted 1983 and Effective January 20, 2004.

CDPHE-WQCC, 2004b. "Status of Water Quality in Colorado – 2004, The Update to the 2002 305(b) Report," April.

CDPHE-WQCC, 2004c. "Regulation No. 93, 2004 Section 303(d) List Water-Quality-Limited Segments Requiring TMDLs," effective May 31.

CDPHE-WQCC, 2004d. "Regulation No. 94, Colorado's Monitoring and Evaluation List," effective May 31.

USDI Bureau of Land Management, Colorado. 1997. White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP). Meeker, Colorado.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED: None

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

Name	Title	Area of Responsibility
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Air Quality
Tamera Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
Tamera Meagley	Natural Resource Specialist	Threatened and Endangered Plant Species
Michael Selle	Archeologist	Cultural Resources Paleontological Resources
Mark Hafkenschiel	Rangeland Management Specialist	Invasive, Non-Native Species, Rangeland Management, Vegetation
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Wildlife
Melissa Kindall	Hazmat Collateral	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Water Quality, Surface and Ground Hydrology and Water Rights
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness
Nate Dieterich	Hydrologist	Soils
Lisa Belmonte	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Terrestrial and Aquatic
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Access and Transportation
Ken Holsinger	Natural Resource Specialist	Fire Management
Robert Fowler	Forester	Forest Management
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals
Linda Jones	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations
Chris Ham	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation
Keith Whitaker	Natural Resource Specialist	Visual Resources
Melissa Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horses

Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)

CO-110-2006-007-EA

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE: The environmental assessment and analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION/RATIONALE: It is my decision to approve the proposed action with the following mitigation measures, as well as those included in the Plan of Development for the Proposed Action. The project consists of the construction, operation, maintenance, and termination of 24,288 feet of overhead, 3-phase, 138 KV electrical power line on wooden H-frame poles.

MITIGATION MEASURES:

Pre-Construction

1. Construction shall not begin until the Exxon Mobil Central Treatment Facility project is authorized, as which time a Notice to Proceed will be issued to White River Electric.
2. To prevent possible disturbance to the five nests found during the survey (2 probable red-tailed and 3 probable accipiter nests) in close proximity to the proposed power line, no construction activity shall take place prior to August 15, 2006. In the event that construction should be delayed until spring 2007, the area must be resurveyed prior to initiation of construction. Removal or damage to any nest trees must be avoided.
3. To further mitigate resource damage, timing of construction operations shall be planned to avoid wet periods when soils are saturated (e.g. during spring thaw, after the late summer monsoons). Spacing of power poles must be designed to avoid surface disturbance in steep areas (e.g. near Big Jimmy Gulch, and Hunter Creek).
4. Potential impacts to surface water shall be mitigated by restricting construction and/or non-emergency maintenance activities on power lines when soils become saturated to a depth of three inches or more.
5. White River Electric shall obtain appropriate permissions from the private land owners. Colorado One Call procedure should be initiated before earth moving activities and construction must not interfere with existing linear rights-of-way.

Cultural and Paleontological

6. If it should become necessary to excavate into the underlying rock formation to prepare a tower location, construct an access road into any tower location, or construct a storage or staging area, a paleontological monitor shall be present prior to the initiation of such construction.

7. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing **paleontological** sites, or for collecting fossils. If fossil materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear to be of noteworthy scientific interest
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not feasible).

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

8. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

9. The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or **archaeological** sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the operator as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the operator wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the operator will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the operator will then be allowed to resume construction.

10. Access to the right-of-way has been identified along existing roads. However, any vegetation manipulations, upgrading, or deviations from the actual existing disturbance must be inventoried by an approved archaeologist prior to proceeding with the disturbance.

Construction and Post-Construction

11. All disturbed areas on the entire right of way shall be promptly reseeded with Native seed mix #3 to preempt cheatgrass dominance. Drill seeding is the preferred method of seeding. If seed is broadcast, double the seeding rate and provide for seed coverage by harrowing or dragging after seed application. Table rates are PLS pounds per acre.

Native Seed mix #3		
Western wheatgrass (Rosanna)	2	Gravelly 10"-14", Pinyon/Juniper Woodland, Stony Foothills, 147 (Mountain Mahogany)
Bluebunch wheatgrass (Whitmar)	2	
Thickspike wheatgrass (Critana)	1	
Indian ricegrass (Rimrock)	2	
Fourwing saltbush (Wytana)	1	
Utah sweetvetch	1	

12. The operator is required to monitor the project area for a minimum of three years post disturbance and eradicate all noxious and invasive species which occur on site using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

13. Mitigation efforts to provide defensible space for the power line structure are built into the proposed action. For structure #11, moving the structure 50m to the north into a southern exposure PJ woodland where fuel loading is approximately 5 tons/acre would expose the structure to less risk, or moving the structure 140m to the east, just off of the existing well pad would remove the risk of fire damage related to the dense PJ chimney and keep the line within the proposed ROW.

14. For all tree trimming operations where chainsaws will be used to remove trees that are too close to the sagging lines or to allow access along the ROW, all produced slash must be lopped and scattered to a depth of no more than 12 inches, well away from center line of the ROW and all stumps must be cut flush with the ground.

15. The applicant shall be required to collect and properly dispose of any solid waste generated by the proposed actions.

16. To minimize production of fugitive particulate matter (fugitive dust) from access routes, vehicle speeds must not exceed 15 mph *or* dust plume must not be visible at appropriate

designated speeds for road design. Utility truck traffic shall be kept to a minimum to reduce the potential impacts of soil compaction.

17. All construction operations will be conducted such that integrity of allotment boundary and pasture fences will be maintained at all times. Any damage to range improvements as a result of powerline construction will be repaired to BLM specifications.

18. To prevent channelization and interference with surface water movement, adequate steps must be taken to inhibit OHV use on the approved ROW (e.g. signage, barriers).

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: Compliance monitoring will be performed at five year intervals by White River Field Office staff.

NAME OF PREPARER: Linda Jones

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: *Caroline P. Helward*

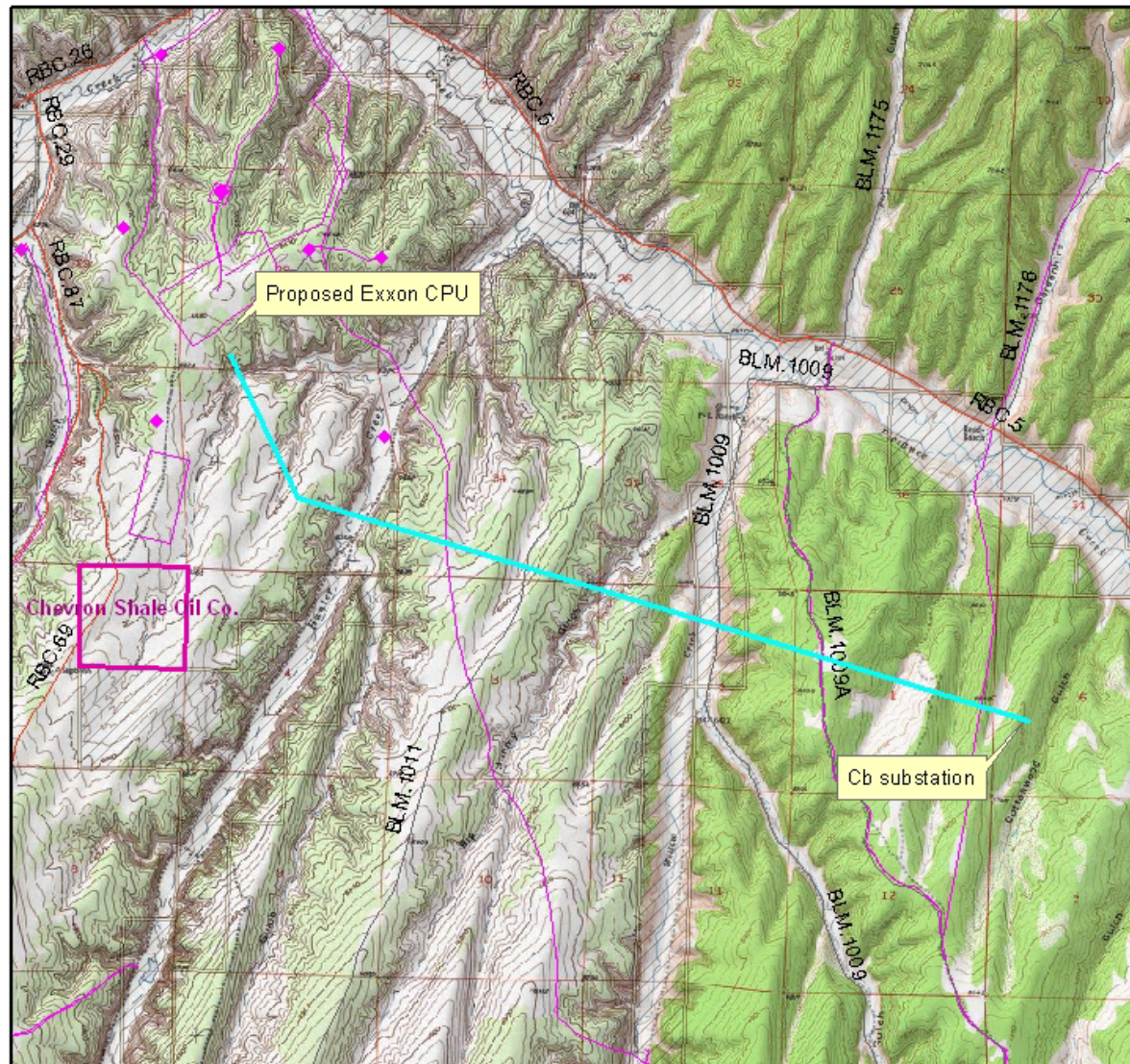
SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: *[Signature]*
Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: *5/11/06*

ATTACHMENTS: Attachment A - Map
Attachment B - Plan of Development
Attachment C - Fire letter

**WHITE RIVER ELECTRIC POWER LINE
COC69308 CO-110-06-007-EA**

EXHIBIT A

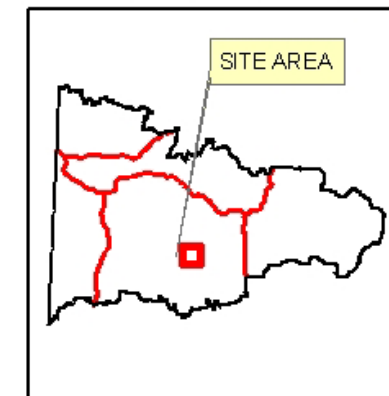


- Field office boundary
- Projects: point
- Projects: line
- Projects: polygon
- BLM
- CDW
- FOR
- NPS
- PRI
- STA
- Major roads**
- RD_CODE**
- Highway
- County
- NPS
- Forest service
- BLM
- Oil Shale RD&D - 160

05/08/2006

SCALE 1:48,000

6th PM T2S R97W sec 28 33 34
T3S R96W sec 6
T3S R97W sec 1 2 3



**White River Electric Assn, Inc.
P.O. Box 958
Meeker, Colorado**

**October 1, 2005
Revised January 16, 2006**

**Supplemental to
Application for Transportation and
Utility Systems and Facilities
on Federal Lands**

POWER LINE PLAN OF DEVELOPMENT

Purpose and Need for the Facility

To construct and to maintain a 138 kV Overhead Transmission Line (1) To serve an ExxonMobil compressor station, (2) Provide for future improvements for service throughout the Piceance and Black Sulphur areas and (3) to provide future back-up power for users in the White River Electric System in the event of unpredicted interruptions.

The source of the electric power will be the existing WREA Piceance Substation near the old Cb oil shale project above Cottonwood Gulch. The new line will be constructed 4.6 miles to the west of the Piceance Substation located on BLM lands. 4.3 miles of line will be on Federal lands. One quarter mile of line will be on private lands. (See attached maps) The destination of the line will be the ExxonMobil compressor station.

The 138 kV transmission line will serve the industrial project of ExxonMobil. The line is not ancillary to any existing right-of-way. Other routes were studied, but eliminated because the diligence of trying to keep the line as short as possible and avoiding known ACEC areas along and north of Piceance Creek.

Right-of-way Location

Affected Lands:

Township 3 South, Range 96 West, 6th P.M., Rio Blanco County, Colorado

Section 6: NWSW

Township 3 South, Range 97 West, 6th P.M., Rio Blanco County, Colorado

Section 1: N1/2, NESE, NESE

Section 2: N1/2

Section 3: NENE

Township 2 South, Range 97 West, 6th P.M., Rio Blanco County, Colorado

Section 34: S1/2S1/2

Section 33: S1/2, NW1/4

Section 28: SWSW

Length: 4.6 miles - Width: 100' - Acreage: 55.76 Acres

Attached please find reports, maps and drawings of engineering surveys and reports for the critical areas.

Facility Design Factors

The transmission line will be designed for wood H-frame construction. This is a two-pole structure with one crossarm that results in the phase conductors being oriented in a horizontal configuration. Angle structures will consist of three poles. This configuration minimizes the pole height for a given span and allows for longer spans than single pole structures with phase over phase construction. The result is longer spans and fewer, shorter structures than other designs. The H-frame structure has a 15' separation between phase conductors and provides protection from electrocution for raptors.

The distance between structures will be about 800 feet on the average with the potential for some spans of greater than 1200 feet. The attached plan shows the actual distances. The requested width of right-of-way is 50 feet on each side of centerline plus a 100 foot radius around angle structures.

Structure Site Selection

Structure sites and pole heights were chosen to minimize visual impacts where possible. As a result structures designs were selected and located to achieve a balance between a minimal number of structures and minimum average structure height. This resulted in an average pole height of 60-65 feet. A drawing of a typical structure is attached. Where possible, structures were located to achieve spanning of canyons as opposed to locating structures in the bottom of a canyon crossing. Vehicular access was considered during structure site selection.

Access to Structure Sites

All structures will be located such that vehicle access with off road type equipment is possible for construction and subsequent maintenance. This access will be overland travel from existing roads where possible. Where required, brush and tree removal will be accomplished with a Hydroax. Access development will not involve ground disturbance.

Structure Site Clearing

An area with a radius of 50-75' around each structure will be cleared of brush and trees with a Hydroax to remove fuels thereby providing a buffer for fire suppression and to allow for framing of structures during construction. The clearing activities will not involve ground disturbance. Natural grasses and shrubs will be allowed to re-vegetate this area after construction.

Tree Trimming

In areas of forestation, some tree trimming may be necessary between structures. Clear cutting of trees within the ROW is not proposed. However, taller trees can present a hazard to the conductors and a fire hazard to the area should they contact the conductor. These tall trees will be removed on a case by case basis after the conductors have been strung. A minimum of 10' clearance between the top of the tree and the conductors will be the criteria used for assessing the need to remove a tree. The conductors will have a minimum height above ground of

approximately 30' so, in general, only trees taller than 20' would be candidates for removal. Due to terrain and attachment heights at structures, the conductors are usually well above the 30' minimum height, reducing further the potential for conflicts with trees in pinion/juniper forests.

Some additional thinning or removal may be desirable for fuels reduction in the thickest growths of trees underneath the line. Intense fire directly beneath a conductor can result in irreparable damage to the wires and therefore, fuels reduction treatments are desirable as a fire mitigation tool in these isolated areas. These treatments will be accomplished in a mosaic pattern with an effort to minimize community fragmentation.

Road and Structure Site Grading

Access to each structure site requires vehicular access. A small off road crane is used to erect structures on the site. In some instances grading of an access road and/or leveling of a structure site is necessary for safe operation of this equipment. However, on this project no grading of roads or structure sites is planned.

Future Maintenance Activities

WREA will conduct routine inspections of the transmission line to insure safe operation. This will be accomplished via annual visual inspections, typically from a helicopter. Maintenance requirements are rare for transmission lines of this design and would be expected to be very infrequent. When maintenance is required it will typically require vehicular access to the structure as during construction.

Discussion of Alternatives

Background - The ExxonMobil project requires approximately 40,000-kW of electrical power. Power lines in the area of the project consist of 24.9-kV distribution lines and 138kV transmission lines. Due to its length and small conductor the 24.9kV distribution line is capable of serving only about 5,000-kW of load. The 138kV transmission line is the only practical option for providing the electrical power needs of the project.

The closest existing 138kV transmission line source is located at the Piceance Substation, approximately 4.6 miles east of the ExxonMobil site. Our alternative route evaluations were guided by environmental and engineering assessments as follows:

Environmental – The transmission line should minimize known and potential impacts to flora, fauna and cultural resources in and around its location. This effort was guided by advice from local authorities on expected resources that would be found on each potential route. Detailed cultural, botanical and wildlife studies were then conducted on the preferred alternative. Reports have been submitted in support of this application.

Engineering – The assessment of engineering options for the transmission line considered safety, capital cost, maintenance and readily available materials. In regard to safety, the line design would be required to meet all applicable codes and standards for design, construction and operations. To minimize cost, it was desirable to select the shortest reasonable route and avoid angle structures where possible. Maintenance objectives included reasonable future access to structures and standard materials for which WREA maintains an inventory of spare parts.

The following alternatives were investigated as potential options for routing of the 138kV transmission line from the Piceance Substation to ExxonMobil.

Alternative 1: Piceance Creek Route

Description: This alternative would traverse northeast from the Piceance Substation along the ridge above Cottonwood Gulch for approximately 1 mile, turn northwest following Piceance Creek for 4.5 miles, turn southwest up Hunter Creek for 1 mile and the traverse west for 1 miles to the project site.

Assessment: The route is the longest alternative at approximately 7.5 miles. The first mile along the ridge consists of pinion and juniper stands that would require some clearing for structure location and fuels reductions. The majority of the route traverses creek bottom land consisting primarily of hay fields and marsh lands. Structures located in hay fields would have some adverse impact to farming operations. Where possible it is desirable to avoid location of power lines within agricultural zones to minimize the potential for accidental contact with power lines. This route would follow County Road 5 for about 4.5 miles and would be highly visible to traffic along the road. The alternative would require several additional angle structures and was estimated to have a construction cost of \$2,000,000. Additional private land easement expenses would be incurred.

Alternative 2: Preferred Route

Description: This alternative traverses west-northwest from the Piceance Substation on a generally direct route for approximately 4.6 miles to the project site.

Assessment: This route was optimized by ground survey to minimize impact upon tree resources, reduce visibility, and take advantage of existing roads for access. The route generally traverses open meadow land and crosses several large canyons. Canyon crossings were spanned where possible to minimize visual impacts of the line. A single large angle structure is required on this route. The estimated construction cost is \$1,200,000.

Alternative Route #2 was selected as the overall preferred alternative due to fewer environmental impacts and significantly lower costs. Detailed Cultural, Botanical and Wildlife Studies were conducted on this alternative and submitted in support of this application.

Additional Components

1. Existing components on and off public land: A White River Electric 138 KV Power line now serving the Piceance Creek area being the source of power for this project.
2. Future components: None at this time. There is a desire to create back up power in the future. The route and source is not known.
3. Location of the Substation: The substation for this project is located on BLM land.

4. Permanent and temporary access: Permanent access to the line will be the location of the structures and facilities together with the need to maintain the line. Temporary access: Roads for construction with a potential of reusing in the event of maintenance required.
5. Communication facility: None.
6. Storage: On private property. Staging areas: (1) Primary staging on private property. (2) Secondary staging on BLM lands near or on centerline of the proposed right-of-way.

Government Agencies Involved

Rio Blanco County will review the project under their land use regulations. No other agencies are anticipated.

Construction of Facilities

- a. Major facilities on BLM lands are the location of wooden structures. All construction material will be located on private lands. The number of loads will be dependant on the size of trucks delivering the 75 wood poles and associated hardware.
- b. Work force will be 6-8 employees utilizing cranes and trucks.
- c. Flagging of the right of way is completed.
- d. Clearing will be along centerline. This will generally be limited to a 100' radius around each structure and the access roads.
- e. Construction of the project is desired for June 1, 2006. Construction will require 90-120 days, depending on weather.
- f. Access to structures is shown on the attached maps.
- g. No helicopters are anticipated, although they could be utilized briefly in wire stringing.
- h. Size of framing pads will be within 50 feet of the structure.
- i. Access to the framing pads is shown on the drawings.
- j. Contacts:
 - a. White River Electric Assn, Inc., Mr. Dick Welle, General Manager
 - b. Reliable Energy Services, Inc., Mr. Ken McBryde, Project Engineer
 - c. BLM-unknown
- k. Safety requirements are addressed within the White River Electric policies to contractors and public.
- l. No industrial waste or toxic substance anticipated.

Resource Values and Environmental Concerns

Refer to Standard Form 299, Page 2, #13-19

- a. No existing corridors in area of the project.
- b. Working with resource specialist, an attempt to minimized conflicts with resources.

Stabilization and Rehabilitation

- a. Top soil is not expected to be disturbed, but where required it will be removed and stored as needed. With minimum disturbance of soils, no Stormwater Management Plan is anticipated.
- b. If larger trees are required to be removed, they will be stored along the right-of-way and moved to an area for wildlife values. If the BLM desires the removal of trees a program will be completed.
- c. No fertilizer anticipated.
- d. Access is limited to construction and maintenance of the facilities.
- e. All disturbed roads will be reclaimed where required.

Operation and Maintenance

- a. Safety will be a high priority. White River Electric has safety manuals in place and will be administered.
- b. No industrial waste and toxic substances.
- c. Inspection and maintenance schedules are continuing.
- d. Work schedule: Upon issuance of permit to 90 days thereafter.
- e. Fire control: Will meet BLM requirements.
- f. Long term access will be limited to maintenance agenda.
- g. No signs required.
- h. Annual inspections will be from ground or helicopter.
- i. Contingency planning will be discussed with BLM personnel.

Termination and Restoration

- a. Removal of structures not anticipated.
- b. No permanent roads anticipated.
- c. Stabilization of soils will be completed, if needed, by re-vegetation using a seed of BLM specifications.



RELIABLE ENERGY SERVICES, INC.

Exhibit C

March 1, 2006

Ms. Linda L. Jones
Bureau of Land Management
73544 Highway 64
Meeker, Colorado 81641

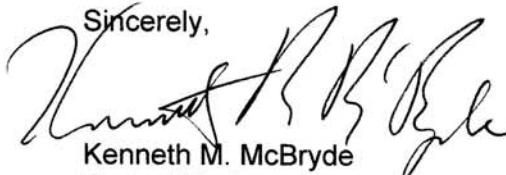
Dear Ms. Jones:

The following is in response to your request for a letter stating that WREA understands the BLM's current fire suppression policies in the Piceance Creek area.

WREA understands that all or portions of the planned Piceance - ExxonMobil 138kV transmission line (approximately 4.6 miles in length) lies in the BLM's Area D Polygon fire designation. We further understand that naturally occurring fires within this designation are allowed to burn and could present a risk to the planned power line. We have proposed fire mitigation measures in the construction plan that will help avoid damage to the line should such a fire occur. The brush and trees will be cleared for 100 feet around each structure along with some trimming and thinning of trees underneath the line. Where possible trees will be removed with a hydroax to shred and spread the material. When a hydroax is not practical trees will be removed with a chain saw, according to BLM prescribed methods, and the material removed from underneath the line. The cost of fuel reduction measures undertaken during construction of the line will be charged to the industrial customer. Any future fuel reduction costs would be born by WREA.

With our continued ability to maintain these fuel free zones around each structure and periodic trimming of trees underneath the line we believe the risk of fire damage will be minimal and is acceptable to WREA.

Sincerely,



Kenneth M. McBryde
Project Engineer

cc: Mr. Richard Welle, WREA